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ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRANTS FROM TAJIKISTAN IN RUSSIA

This report examines the trends and patterns of labor migration of Tajiks to the Russian Federation in recent years. The research focuses on the position of Tajik labor migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Russian labor market and in Russian society.

Leaving for temporary work in the Russian Federation for citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan has become a widespread phenomenon and a significant socio-economic phenomenon. There are about 1 million Tajik citizens and ethnic Tajiks in Russia, as well as their family members. For Russia, Tajikistan is an important supplier of labor migrants: approximately 25% of all labor migrants in Russia come from Tajikistan. Labor migrants from Tajikistan are the second largest group of labor migrants in the Russian labor market; they are represented in various sectors of the economy and regions of Russia. According to a rough estimate, Tajik labor migrants produce about 1.3% of Russia's GDP, and also make a certain contribution to the country's demographic development. For example, in 2020, more than 63 thousand people from Tajikistan entered Russian citizenship (second place after citizens of Ukraine). Tajik migrants add to the population of some regions and settlements in Russia, especially in rural areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly complicated the situation of Tajik citizens - temporary labor migrants in Russia. Many were unable to leave Russia before the borders were closed, and during the lockdown they lost their jobs and sources of income. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Tajik labor migrants from Tajikistan in the Russian labor market have become a rather vulnerable group of workers. According to a survey in April 2020, about 28% of Tajik migrants surveyed were fired and unemployed, 39% were sent on unpaid leave. In fact, 67% of interviewed migrants from Tajikistan were unemployed and had practically no sources of income at the beginning of the pandemic. Calculations showed that during March-April 2020, the employment of labor migrants from Tajikistan, against the background of restrictions and self-isolation, decreased by 60%. However, most

likely, this reduction was short-term and as the restrictions were lifted, the employment of Tajiks began to recover at a fairly rapid pace. Despite the shock associated with declining employment at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, by February 2021 there was a gradual recovery in the employment of Tajik labor migrants in the Russian labor market. However, this recovery was accompanied by some regional and sectoral transformations, as well as a reduction in wages and a drop in the income level of Tajik labor migrants. In addition, many of them were sick with the coronavirus, undermined their psychological and physical health during the pandemic.

In April 2020, it was revealed that the most pressing life problems of labor migrants from Tajikistan at the beginning of the pandemic were the inability to pay for housing (about 57%), the loss and inability to find a job (40%) and the lack of money for food (29%). About 14% had problems with police checks, poor living conditions - 8% and 1% of respondents could not pay for a patent. At the beginning of the pandemic, a survey in April 2020 showed that 88% of migrants from Tajikistan had reduced income, which was obviously a shock reaction to the self-isolation regime, the introduction of restrictions, the closure of economic facilities, and the loss of jobs by migrants. In February 2021, 59% of surveyed labor migrants from Tajikistan said that their income had decreased during the pandemic. The share of those whose expenses have not changed significantly increased (11% and 27%, respectively). The share of migrants whose incomes increased from 1% to 14%. Labor migrants have generally adapted to the situation on the labor market.

Due to the suspension of the work of enterprises and counters, many labor migrants from Tajikistan in large cities of Russia found themselves in a confined space with poor hygienic conditions, inhabited by many people (hostels, hostels, cheap hotels, trailers). Only a small number of migrants can afford to rent housing on their own. Most often, migrants rent apartments for several people, relatives and fellow countrymen live together. In April 2020, the average number of labor migrants from Tajikistan living in one apartment (house) was 4 people, and in February 2021 - 3.8 people. A significant proportion of labor migrants from Tajikistan live in rather cramped conditions: in April 2020, every fifth respondent (22%) lived with four neighbors, and in February 2021, every third respondent lived with three roommates or apartment mates. Such living conditions made it impossible to maintain physical distance in places of residence, and, as a result, led to higher risks of infection with COVID-19.

Labor migrants from Tajikistan find themselves in an extremely vulnerable position during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the conditions of the regime of self-

isolation and the closure of businesses and enterprises, they lost their jobs and income, found themselves in a confined space with no means of livelihood, were stigmatized and pressured by the police, while most of them could not leave Russia due to the closure of borders and lack of funds. Labor migrants were at high risk of contracting COVID-19 due to poor living conditions, poor nutrition and lack of access to medical care. During the COVID-19 pandemic in Russia, Tajik labor migrants received assistance from non-governmental organizations, Tajik entrepreneurs and employers. It should be noted the high degree of cohesion and solidarity shown by representatives of the Tajik communities in difficult times, providing assistance to Tajik migrants who were left without work and livelihood.

Remittances from Russia to Tajikistan fell sharply during the pandemic. But their recovery took place relatively quickly in the second half of 2020. As a result, by the end of 2020, only 6.3% less remittances were transferred to Tajikistan, despite the fact that 350 thousand Tajik labor migrants were unable to leave to work in Russia. The largest contribution to the recovery of remittances home and the economic support of families in Tajikistan is made by migrants, who transfer home from a third to half of their wages. By the end of 2020, remittances to Tajikistan have almost completely recovered.

This study was designed to identify the key problems faced by Tajik labor migrants in Russia during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, to determine how much social assistance was available to them during the pandemic, and to offer recommendations on how to help people in difficult situations outside their homeland. The implementation of many of the proposed measures is possible only with the active participation of all interested parties: the authorities of the Republic of Tajikistan, the authorities of the Russian Federation, international organizations, the UN system, non-governmental organizations, representatives of organizations of labor migrants from Tajikistan. The proposed actions are grouped according to key areas of activity: political, , economic, social, medical, and informational measures.

The study makes it possible to actualize before governments, non-governmental and international organizations the issues of providing assistance to vulnerable categories of the population, which include labor migrants who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, using the example of migrant workers from Tajikistan. The study also focuses the attention of the general public on the powerful human potential of such a category of the population as migrant workers from Tajikistan, who are distinguished by their resilience, adaptability and the ability to survive in difficult and stressful conditions.